

REMARKS

Claims 1-25 are pending in this application. For purposes of expedition, claims 1, 6 and 15 have been amended, pursuant to the agreement reached with the Examiner during the telephone interview conducted on February 18, 2004, and the suggestion offered by the Examiner as outlined in the Advisory Action (Paper No. 0204) in order to clearly define Applicants' disclosed invention over the cited prior art and to place the application in condition for allowance. Dependent claims 3, 7 and 17 have been amended to ensure proper antecedent basis for several terms defined in base claims 1, 6 and 15.

Specifically, on page 3 of the Advisory Action (Paper No. 0204), the Examiner states that,

"Applicant's representative and Examiner discussed the proposed amendments filed on 02/03/04. Examiner noted that the amendments still fail to structurally distinguish the claimed invention from the prior art. All recitations included in the claims drawn to the order to treating a wafer in the claimed apparatus are intended uses of the apparatus. The apparatus does not have to be used for the intended method recited in Applicant's claims. Because the presently pending claims are apparatus claims, the claims must structurally differentiate themselves, rather than differentiate themselves based on a method that could be practiced using the apparatus. Examiner suggested ways that may possible be used to incorporate an order of processing into the structure of a multi-chamber apparatus. Those suggestions included: 1) including limitations based on the layout/connectivity of the units of an apparatus that would necessitate a wafer be processed in the units in a particular order and 2) including a programmable control part as a structure of the apparatus that functions to control the order of processing. Alternatively, an application for a processing method could be filed."

In view of the Examiner's suggestion, base claims 1, 6 and 15 have been amended to incorporate "control means" as a structure of the apparatus that functions to

control the order of processing, as suggested by the Examiner in order to place the application in condition for allowance. Specifically, base claims 1, 6 and 15 have been amended to incorporate, for example, "control means for controlling an order of treatment of each working unit, including the etching means, the ashing means, the wetting means and the drying means for transportation, using said transport means, along the depressurizable transport passage" so that "depending upon an order of treatment designated by said control means, the etched wafer is ashed and then subjected to the wetting treatment, or the etched wafer is wetted and then subjected to an ashing treatment, and afterwards, the etched wafer is again measured by the integrated measuring instrument." As amended, base claims 1, 6 and 15 are believed in condition for allowance.

In addition, base claims 1, 6 and 15 have also been amended to define "a depressurizable transport passage" as expressly defined in dependent claims 3 and 17, and described on page 10, line 7 extending to page 11, line 26 of Applicants' disclosure in order to further clarify several advantages of Applicants' disclosed invention relative to the cited prior art, that is, the change of order of treatment of a wafer sample which has less influence on the order of transport of the sample and, as a result, the time of sample transportation is shortened.

Claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fairbairn, U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0155629, in view of Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952 for reasons stated on pages 2-4 of the final Office Action (Paper No. 7) dated on November 3, 2003. For reasons previously presented in the Amendment After Final filed on February 3, 2004, Applicants believe that claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20 are distinguishable over the Examiner's proposed combination of Fairbairn, U.S.

Patent Publication No. 2002/0155629, Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952. However, in the interest of expedition, base claims 1, 6 and 15 have been amended to incorporate "control means" as a structure of the apparatus that functions to control the order of processing, as suggested by the Examiner in order to render the rejection moot and to place the application in condition for allowance.

Claims 2 and 16 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fairbairn, U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0155629, Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952 as applied to claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20, and further in view of Edwards, U.S. Patent No. 6,042,623 for reasons stated on page 4 of the final Office Action (Paper No. 7). Claims 3 and 17 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fairbairn, U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0155629, Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952 as applied to claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20, and further in view of Imahashi, U.S. Patent No. 5,695,564 for reasons stated on page 5 of the final Office Action (Paper No. 7). Lastly, claims 4 and 8 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fairbairn, U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0155629, Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952 as applied to claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20, and further in view of Watanabe, JP 2000173530 for reasons stated on page 5 of the final Office Action (Paper No. 7). Since the correctness of the rejections of the dependent claims is predicated upon the correctness of the rejection of Applicants' base claims, Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections, based primarily for the reasons discussed against the rejection of claims 1, 5-15 and 19-20 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fairbairn, U.S. Patent Publication No.

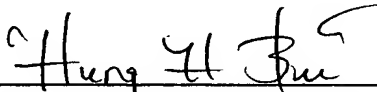
2002/0155629, Spence et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,106,659 and Komino, U.S. Patent No. 5,769,952.

Claims 21-25 have been newly added to alternatively define Applicants' disclosed invention over the prior art of record. These claims are believed to be allowable at least for the same reasons discussed against all the outstanding rejections of the instant application. A fee of \$196.00 is incurred by the addition of five (5) claims in excess of twenty and by the addition of one (1) independent claim.

In view of the foregoing amendments, arguments and remarks, all claims are deemed to be allowable and this application is believed to be in condition to be passed to issue. Should any questions remain unresolved, the Examiner is requested to telephone Applicants' attorney at the Washington DC area office at (703) 312-6600.

To the extent necessary, Applicants petition for an extension of time under 37 CFR §1.136. Please charge any shortage of fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, to the Deposit Account of Antonelli, Terry, Stout & Kraus, No. 01-2135 (Application No. 500.41253X00), and please credit any excess fees to said deposit account.

Respectfully submitted,
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